

Report to:	STOCKPORT HOMES MEMBER COMMITTEE		
Date of Meeting:	06 July 2020 Stockport Homes Member Committee		
Title of Report:	COVID-19: LATEST POSITION		
Report of:	ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE		
Confidentiality	Non Confidential		
Purpose of Report:	To update the Members Committee on SHG's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the impact this has had on services, staff and the business.		
Type of Report	Information		
Recommendation(s):	The Members Committee are requested to note the progress made in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and provide any further comments for consideration.		
Financial Implications of the recommendations	A Financial Risk Assessment has been completed that focusses on forecasts to the 2020/21 budgets. Longer term impacts, along with stress testing have also been completed. Whilst there will be some adverse impacts on various budget areas, some of these will be timing delays. SHG are still forecast to have a balanced budget for 2020/21.		
Value for Money Implications of the recommendations	There are no value for money implications of the recommendation.		
Risk Implications of the recommendations	Risk Number	Risk Description	Risk Mitigation
	New	SHG is not able to adequately recover from the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, which affects service delivery to customers over the medium term.	SHG has ensured effective leadership throughout the response to the pandemic and implementation of government guidance. A Recovery and

			Transformation Plan has been created and there are mechanisms in place to ensure it is delivered.
Council Impact Assessment (CIA)	Does a CIA need to be completed? No	If so, has one been completed?	
Content of Report signed-off by Director	Sandra Coleing 26/06/2020		
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1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 On the 23 March 2020, the Government introduced significant restrictions on movement due to the Covid-19 pandemic. SHG acted swiftly and ensured the company followed government guidelines, whilst ensuring customer services continued as much as possible.
- 1.2 On the 10 May, the Government announced the first relaxations in those restrictions and developed a broad road map to full recovery. SHG have used this guidance and all supplementary documentation to develop how the current service is and can be delivered. The guidance has informed the Recovery and Transformation Plan that has been circulated to Board.
- 1.3 During June there has been several announcements by the Government which has relaxed restrictions further. SHG continues to monitor these announcements and takes appropriate action accordingly.
- 1.4 This report provides an update on the latest position and gives Members Committee the assurance that SHG are supporting their customers and staff throughout this period, while ensuring the financial implications are understood and appropriate action taken.

2 IMPACT ON SERVICES

- 2.1 Covid-19 has had a significant impact on the demand and provision of customer services. Some have increased and some have seen significant reductions, in part due to decisions made by SHG to ensure compliance with the Government restrictions. An overview of the impact on SHG key services over the last couple of months is outlined below.

Repairs

- 2.2 The Repairs Service is one of the highest transactional services, with approximately 900 requests a week, and an additional 200 emergency repairs. When Covid-19 restrictions were put in place, SHG moved to an emergency and health and safety service only. The result was that the number of planned repairs stopped but the number of emergencies stayed the same. The numbers have been steadily increasing with the slow increase in planned activity and the current demand is approximately 700 requests per week. Initially it was thought there would be a backlog of repairs but this hasn't transpired. Currently, there are only around 200 repairs waiting completion.
- 2.3 Throughout this period, the One Number Team has been contacting customers to capture their experience and satisfaction. A specific survey was created and Table One overleaf, highlights the positive satisfaction received.

Table One

Questions Asked	Numbers of customers			
	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Fairly dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied
The workers overall care and use of PPE	187	1	0	0
The effectiveness of the repair	187	1	0	0
Keeping you informed	186	2	0	0
Overall service in these difficult times	187	1	0	0

- 2.4 Customers in the main understood why only emergency repairs were being actioned and in quite a few cases customers were surprised and grateful when operatives came out on the same day.

Void Management

- 2.5 Letting of void properties has continued throughout the Covid-19 restrictions, but with an increase in direct lets to homeless people which subsequently became MHCLG guidance to help free up temporary accommodation provision. The number of properties becoming void is steadily increasing although they are still lower than the same period last year. In the first three weeks of June there were 35 voids compared to 48 in the same period last year. The current average void cost is lower than last year and is just below £3,000, however there are a number of larger voids waiting for surveys that may well increase this slightly over the coming weeks.

One Number

- 2.6 There has been a significant reduction in the number of calls received by the One Number Team. Table Two below shows the number of calls received in the month of January 2020 (often quite a busy month) compared with May 2020. This shows that the team received about 5,000 (30%) less calls.

Table Two

Service area	Jan-20	May-20	Difference
Repairs	5017	2453	-2564
Homechoice	2186	1719	-467
Neighbourhoods	2836	1725	-1111
Customer Finance	4788	3299	-1489
Total	14827	9196	-5631

- 2.7 The Team have used this capacity to make more outbound calls. They have been part of the initiative to make welfare calls to vulnerable customers and in addition made nearly 2,000 calls to tenants on Universal Credit (UC) to make sure that they had updated their UC accounts to get the right amount of benefit. When comparing May to January there were just over 2,000 more outbound calls in May than in January which illustrates the more proactive calling that were being achieved.
- 2.8 In each of the last six weeks the number of calls has increased so inbound calls are beginning to increase again. The average answer rate is at 98.7%, which is the highest performance to date.

Customer Finance

- 2.9 Throughout the Covid-19 period, incoming customer calls and enquiries to Customer Finance were significantly higher than normal. Many of the calls were from customers concerned about maintaining rent payments when their employment situation was unclear. A large proportion of the calls were from customers in long-term employment that had little or no experience of the benefit system. Over this period, the teams have been providing advice, support and reassurance to customers on claiming benefits or accessing new financial support packages.
- 2.10 Since 21 March 2020, customers have made 558 new UC claims, an increase of 100% on the usual number of claims expected over this period. By the end of May, claim numbers started to return to normal levels of around 20-25 per week.
- 2.11 The Customer Finance Team are currently focussing contact on those with increasing arrears that have failed to engage, where the reason for arrears is unknown. A small proportion of customers in arrears (around 4% or 185 cases) have not responded to repeated requests for contact. A number of these cases already have Notices served pre-March or have a court order already in place. Although no Notice to Seek Possession (NSP's) have been served since 21 March 2020, a new NSP approval process is being developed for cases where contact attempts are exhausted.

Homelessness

- 2.12 When the nature and scale of the situation became clear in March, the initial focus was upon minimising infection risk within the Borough's temporary accommodation schemes and seeking to place as many rough sleepers as possible. This was followed by a national requirement for local authorities to make an offer of accommodation to all street homeless people wherever possible, accompanied by funding to lease hotels in Manchester to increase the supply of emergency placements.
- 2.13 The small number of emergency shared rooms within the Councils' temporary accommodation schemes were immediately closed, with additional short-term flats taken on (from the existing 'general let' Council housing) within the Borough to increase capacity. Social distancing measures were put in place with communal areas closed, regular deep cleans arranged and additional microwave ovens provided and meal provision organised to limit social contact.

- 2.14 At the start of the Covid crisis there was an increase in numbers presenting as rough sleeping due to people in lodging arrangements being asked to leave by households concerned about infection. This has amounted to around 24 extra potential rough sleepers being accommodated between 23 March and 22 June, however numbers have fallen away since the first two weeks of restrictions.
- 2.15 More generally, the number of people presenting as homeless has reduced, largely because of regulations preventing private landlords seeking to repossess properties until August 2020. Numbers of domestic abuse cases have remained relatively stable, although a rise is anticipated when people are more able to leave their homes and access services.
- 2.16 SHG also arranged for staff to help provide support and manage the four hotels procured by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), which provided over 300 additional bed spaces. A range of health interventions in the hotels were put in place, from dealing with substance misuse issues to mental health and psychological services. Funding for these hotels ceases at the end of June, and the key issue was to ensure alternative accommodation was made available for all those still in placements. This was achieved and there is no one left, placed by Stockport.

Customer Feedback

- 2.17 The number of complaints received by SHG fell significantly following the start of the Covid-19 restrictions in March, with 63 logged between 23 March 2020 and 24 June 2020, down from 95 in the same period during 2019. The amount of contact from Elected Members did however remain fairly constant at 110, compared to 106 the previous year.

ASB

- 2.18 Reports of ASB have increased since the Government restrictions were put in place. In April new reports of ASB increased by 122% compared to April 2019 (189 new cases from 85) and by 59 percent in May 2020 compared to the year before (149 cases from 94). Numbers of new cases in May 2020 did decrease in the latter weeks of the month resulting in an overall reduction of 21 per cent compared to April (189 new cases to 149). However, that reduction has been short-lived and there has been a 100% increase in new reports during the first week in June compared to the last week in May (56 new reports compared to 23) and this increase continues with 38 cases reported week commencing 15 June.
- 2.19 Covid-19 complaints relating to purely social distancing have continued but have reduced significantly. It is anticipated that these will reduce further as restrictions are eased and hopefully the same will apply to general ASB cases.
- 2.20 The ASB Service surveys complainants in cases that have been closed to gauge how satisfied they are with the outcome of their case and how it has been handled. As at the end of May 2020, 39 customers were surveyed with 38 stating that they were satisfied with how their case had been handled.

Your Local Pantry

- 2.21 Your Local Pantry has been an invaluable provision though the current restrictions. The Team have worked collaboratively with Stockport Council and the local foodbanks to provide food parcels to 'shielded' residents who ring the Council helpline as well as SHG's own customers. Table Three below, highlights how the demand has peaked and reduced over the last month.

Table Three

Week commencing	Food Deliveries direct to home	Member Visits to Pantries
6 April	265	88
13 April	334	87
20 April	367	96
27 April	338	95
4 May	276	97
11 May	203	97
18 May	201	100
25 May	155	92
1 June	121	108
8 June	102	91
15 June	123	60

Moving forward, the team are supporting customers who can visit the pantries to do so which means that home deliveries can be prioritised for those who need them and the normal service provision is restored.

3 CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

- 3.1 Customer communication and support has been a priority for SHG during Covid-19. Nearly 5,000 customers have been successfully contacted to understand their needs and provide additional support. This started with tenants who were over 70 years of age and Carecall customers. These phone calls are continuing on lower age groups and to those who still need support.
- 3.2 From 24 March, the dedicated information page on SHG's website regarding Covid-19 has been visited 4,066 times and has been updated daily to reflect the changes in services, and in turn helped to provide financial advice; employment support and reassurance. 1,561 enquiries have been responded to with a direct message; an increase of 218%.
- 3.3 To maximise engagement with customers, e-shots, text messages and the use of the digital display boards in multi-storey blocks has been maximised. Specifically, within blocks, sheltered accommodation and Temporary Accommodation individual flyers, leaflets and information were developed. All the information that has been promoted and shared with partner agencies and community groups, and has been offered in a range of different formats.

- 3.4 Carecall had a goal during the Covid-19 crisis to make social media a more positive experience for local residents and customers. They achieved this by producing content within two key pillars of messaging, #KeepStockportSmiling and #YouAreNeverAloneWithCarecall.
- 3.5 As part of #KeepStockportSmiling, Carecall encouraged residents to create material such as poems, letters and drawings that could lift-up the mood of self-isolating customers and be passed onto them during a visit from Carecall. Content posted within this social campaign had a reach of over 39,000 people. Social content posted with a message of #YouAreNeverAloneWithCarecall sought to re-assure customers that there is support available and this message was re-iterated by a billboard in Stockport Town Centre. A single image of this billboard on Facebook received 41,500 views and was interacted with by over 4,000 people.
- 3.6 This increased digital presence led to positive press in a national newspaper, Daily Mail, and local publication, the Stockport Express, while also helping to sustain new customer enquiries during a period where they were negatively impacted by Covid-19.

4 CUSTOMER CONSULTATION

- 4.1 During the restrictions, many SHG services have had to adopt a different format for customer contact. This has resulted in changes to how some of the most frequently used services are delivered, generally from face to face and home visits towards telephone and digitally based options.
- 4.2 While customer feedback has been gathered through social media, the One Number Team and other customer contact, it is important to review individual services and understand customer views by their specific experience. As a consequence a range of surveys have been created and are currently being agreed with each service manager before distribution.
- 4.3 Each service area will be responded to separately to reflect the differing expectations of customers using them and different logistical challenges and importance. All the surveys will focus on customer perceptions of services delivery during Covid-19, and how customers feel about future service delivery formats/choices. Additional evidence from customers will be included in the review, such as satisfaction surveys and anecdotal responses to large scale initiatives such as the welfare calls and pantry home deliveries. It is intended the survey work will be largely completed by the end of August 2020, subject to agreed sample sizes having been achieved.

5 IMPACT ON STAFF

- 5.1 The impact on staff was significant and regular communication was key to ensuring consistent messages and advice was given to all staff, who were dealing with many different issues, including balancing work and home responsibilities. SHG took a pragmatic and supportive approach to this and promoted key messages around flexible working, while working creatively to maintain productivity.

- 5.2 From the 1 June, staff who can't work at home have been able to work in Cornerstone. This has resulted in around 60 staff being in the building on any one day. The measures put in a place to ensure social distancing and to keep staff safe have been well received. An induction video that was produced, has particularly gone down well and SHG has received positive feedback from the Council, external partners and other housing providers on the content and format.
- 5.3 The number of staff with Covid-19 symptoms continues to be low and currently (as of 19 June) there is one member of staff sick with symptoms and eight self-isolating. It is expected the numbers of self-isolating may increase as track and trace is introduced but the length of self-isolation should be significantly less as testing and results are becoming quicker to arrange. There has been no member of staff hospitalised.
- 5.4 During this challenging period, it has been important to capture staff views and experiences to ensure high levels of staff engagement continues. A 'Best Companies "Pulse" Survey was completed and feedback has been positive with SHG retaining its 'three star extraordinary' status.
- 5.5 An additional survey was created internally, focusing on specific activities in relation to the way staff have been working, what has worked well, what hasn't gone so well and what lessons can be learnt. This is in relation to staff's own experiences and the impact on customers. Results are currently being analysed and will feed into SHG Recovery and Transformation Plans.

6 WORKING WITH THE COUNCIL AND PARTNERS

- 6.1 Throughout this period, SHG have been part of a multi-agency Tactical Support Group that initially met daily and now meets twice a week. The group consists of Senior Officers from Stockport Council, the Hospital Trust, Primary Care, Police and Fire. It discusses the current situation in Stockport and a joint response and approach is taken. It is a collaborative and supportive mechanism that works well.

7 RECOVERY AND TRANSFORMATION

- 7.1 On 10 May, the Government announced a road map to recovery and SHG, started to plan for that recovery. Within this period, there have been many new positive ways of working, for instance, more people have been using virtual meetings and digital technologies have been deployed. The Recovery and Transformation Plan has been created to capture both elements.
- 7.2 The Recovery and Transformation Plan is attached at **Appendix One**. The plan is ordered by service area, and then categorised as either recovery or transformation. Recovery focuses on getting services back up to full capacity, while transformation is about capturing the positive changes that have been made or that have been identified as an area for improvement.
- 7.3 The plan has been created by consulting with managers and staff. Covid-19 has been a key agenda item at weekly meetings with the Senior Leadership Team and many ideas and plans have been debated and agreed. Further consultation with customers is planned and will feed into this plan.

8 FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Reviewing the financial and risk implications of Covid-19 has been a significant focus for SHG. An initial financial assessment has been completed and all budget managers are reviewing their current budgets to assess any additional pressures or potential savings as a consequence of Covid-19 and forecasts will be continually tracked through the monthly Management Accounts.
- 8.2 Additional risks associated with Covid-19 have been reviewed along with the risk scores for the existing Corporate Risk Register. These were presented to SHG Board on the 22 June and are available on request.

9 RECOMMENDATION

The Members Committee are requested to note the progress made in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic and provide any further comments for consideration.